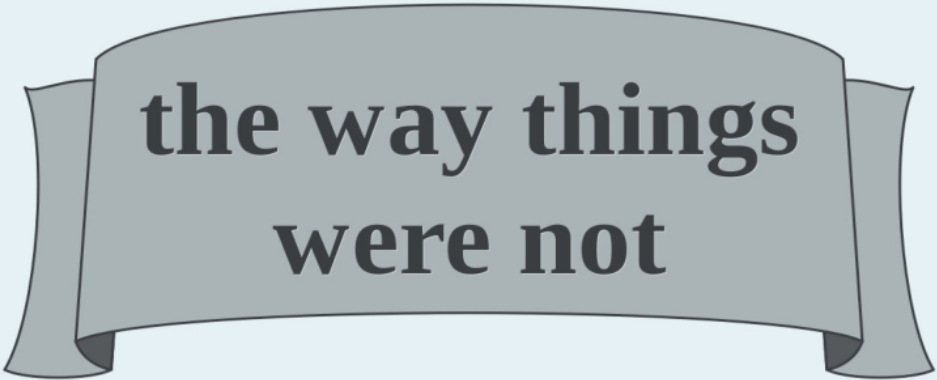




**the way things
were not**

**tossertozier
(rednoseredhair)**

the way things were not by tossertozier (rednoseredhair)

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Genre: :, AU, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Amnesia, Angst, Forgetting, M/M, a little bit, but imma take it as, idk the whole forgetting everything in the book is incredibly vague, im sorry, they forget everything, whole shabang

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Summary:

“Oh my god,” Mike sighed, “I already know how this goes:” he set his book down. “You kiss Richie, then you hate Richie, but you literally never shut the fuck up about him.”

the way things were not

“Oh, god, Mike,” Eddie cringed the second he walked into Mike’s office in the library. “You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” Eddie marched over to a window, and with a little bit of struggle, shoved it open. Eddie managed to be impossibly small, even at the age 18. Mike felt mildly hypocritical thinking that, having a mere inch on the boy in height, but Eddie lacked any real shoulder definition or mass. He managed to look small in every definition of the term.

The room was itself small and dark, with a single window and shoddy lighting. It smelled musty, suspiciously like mold, and it was crammed with boxes of records that got misplaced and never found their way back home. It was Mike’s office for his first paid position at the library, and he loved it.

“Hey,” Mike grinned, taking off his reading glasses and rubbing at his tired eyes. “What’s up?”

Eddie sat on the windowsill. Mike couldn’t dream of cramming himself into that small of a space. Eddie managed to curl up just fine, drawing his knees into his chest.

“Needed a break from everyone,” He shrugged. “I just witnessed a two hour fight about a label maker.”

“Did you get involved?” Mike asked without looking up, shuffling around the papers on his desk. He was so interested in the file that he realized he let all of the papers come out of order. They weren’t numbered, they were old. Old enough to be from before when everything was just easily numbered.

He knew from Eddie’s silence that he shook his head.

Mike looked up at him, and raised an eyebrow.

Eddie huffed, and kicked his orange backpack towards Mike. Mike took that for what it was: an invitation to open it.

Inside were the usual things, an agenda and a calendar. But

anywhere his name was written, the word “CUTE” was printed on a label and stuck just before it.

“Richie used an entire roll of Stan’s label maker to do that, and they got in a fight about it for two hours.”

Mike snorted, shoving the folder back into his backpack “cu-”

“If you finish that word, Mike, I swear to God.”

It was inordinately hot that day in the library, but Eddie was there for hours. They sat in a comfortable silence for long stretches, Mike focused on his documents, Eddie pretending to write things down but really worrying himself over something.

But Mike knew when Eddie wanted to talk about whatever Eddie wanted to talk about, he’d talk.

Eddie knew Mike knew that.

That was probably why Eddie was sitting in the cramped window of the most cramped office in the library.

Every so often, Eddie would look up at the clock behind Mike’s head. He fiddled with his nails, ripping at the cuticles but never biting them. He ran his fingers along the metal spine of his notebook, a small clanging orchestra every few moments. Mike listened to it, letting it spin together with the whirl of the fan in the hall, the mess of the noise of the street outside, and the unsettling beat that was Eddie breathing.

“Rich wants me to help him pack up his room tonight.” And there it was, finally. It had only taken the boy hours.

“Is there a lot of stuff?” Mike asked politely, looking up at Eddie again.

“It’s Richie, so, no.” Richie wore about four shirts on a loop, and that was about it.

Mike and Eddie stumbled their way into this conversation every so often. Almost a year ago, Mike couldn’t take it, and flat out told him

that he had no problem with queers. Eddie was visibly relieved, and nodded profusely. And now, on occasion, they tap-danced around this conversation about Richie, and they never brought up the q-word again.

Even now, when Eddie was clearly freaking the fuck out over the fact everyone but he and Mike would leave for college in the next few weeks.

Including Richie.

“Do you want to go?” Mike asked plainly.

“Not at all.” Eddie told him crossly, folding, and then immediately unfolding his hands on his lap.

“But you’re going to?” Mike asked a question that wasn’t one because he knew the answer. Eddie slumped down.

“Probably.”

Mike nodded to himself. “Okay.” He turned back to his papers, not really sure what else he was supposed to say on the topic. He heard Eddie shuffling, shoving the notebook back in his bag. Mike quickly realized that this might be his only shot to ask. Once again, he was asking a question he already knew the answer to, and yet, for some reason, he wanted the validation of hearing the answer out loud.

“Eddie?” He asked, just before Eddie got to the door. “are you guys, like, together?”

“Let me make one thing perfectly clear:” Eddie turned around, giving him a sharp look. “Richie Tozier is the worst person I’ve ever met in my fucking life.” Eddie responded, letting his words fall out all over each other. He turned back to the door.

“That...that didn’t answer my question.” Eddie shut the door to the office midway through Mike’s sentence.

They had about twenty minutes before Richie’s dad was coming back and then driving Richie two hours away to college. Eddie was doing a

spectacular impression of a toddler pretending not to pout. He leaned back against the side of the car as Richie put the last duffle bag into the trunk, and then slammed it shut. Eddie didn't look up as Richie rounded the corner of the car.

"Buck up, Eds," Richie reached for his cheek. Eddie tried to squirm away, but Richie trapped him with a hand on the other side of his hip. "I'm coming home in a few weeks."

"Coming home for homecoming in your freshman year of college is lame." Eddie replied shortly, not looking up at Richie. Richie rolled his eyes under club-master eyeglasses, which he had had since Junior year of high school.

"When," Richie smirked at him, "are you just gonna tell me you'll miss me?" Richie spared a nervous little glance to his left, knowing they weren't in complete full view, because they were in his garage, but with just the tinge of paranoia that ate at Eddie's heart.

"When you suddenly turn into a tolerable pers-" and then Richie grabbed his chin again, and tilted his face up to kiss him, mid-sentence. And he was somewhat indignant, at being interrupted, but mostly fond, and he unfolded his arms. He let himself melt into Richie, just a little bit, when Richie licked into his mouth, and scrunched his hand in the fabric of his shirt at the waist. Eddie let his hands come up, grabbing at Richie's jaw, tangling in the dark curls of his hair.

He let himself kiss and be kissed and not think about college or cars or anything beyond the hair his fingertips could touch.

His heart pounded in his chest anyway, and he felt himself getting short of breath when his mind wouldn't stop racing around the fact Richie was getting in that car in ten minutes no matter how hard they kissed. And he was losing his breath then, and so he settled back, against the car, and Richie came with him, just a little bit, resting his forehead on Eddie's, breathing deeply but not nearing the hyperventilation Eddie was.

"So," Eddie swallowed, dropping his hands from Richie's face to his chest, "you're coming home at the end of September?" He tried his

hardest to sound completely unafflicted either way for someone who just had his mind kissed out of his body.

“I’ll be at your door that last Friday,” Richie’s hands tightened, managing to worm their way around Eddie’s waist, in between Eddie and the car, so they could settle on the small of his back, “Eddie Spaghetti.” He smirked down at the boy, holding him tightly.

“Don’t,” Eddie let his fists ball up in the collar of Richie’s t-shirt, “fucking call me that.” He warned aggressively as he tugged him down to kiss him, just once more.

Or twice.

Who was counting.

Richie leaned up against the pay-phone outside of everyone’s favorite diner in their little Maine college town. It was two p.m. on a Sunday, the time he typically rose on the weekends, and a perfect time to call his parents. Do all of that kid stuff, make sure they knew he wasn’t dead, make sure they remembered to send him an allowance.

“Hey, sport,” his dad had answered, and once they got all of that stuff about grades out of the way, he was passed to his mom.

“Hey, mom.” He greeted kindly, warmly. She sounded present. Sober. His heart panged in his chest at the thought they were probably better off now that he was a good distance away. He was a stressor for his parents. He always was one. He leaned into the booth a little further, not that it bothered him if his friends heard, but it wasn’t like it was any of their business anyway. It only took one or two questions from her before he started talking. About acclimating, about being a freshman and how weird it was to live in a dorm, about his new friends. The floodgates had opened when she asked.

“Yeah,” he began to finish up. Somehow the weeks whirled by in such a rush that it was difficult for him to remember anything that came before it. “I don’t know, Ma’.” He shrugged, shoving a hand into his pocket, leaning against the booth. “I guess I’m glad to have finally made some friends that ‘get me,’ yanow? Like. I don’t remember ever

having friends like this before.”

“Well, you used to run around with that gang of-” for a moment, things flashed into his head. Holding heads under water, scratches from bikes, bloody knuckles. A faint smell of burning leaves, and scratchy wool on his elbows. The sound of crickets. The thoughts, intrusive and burdening, making his shoulders heavy and his eyes squint, whipped out of his mind as quickly as they came in.

“Not the same.” He interrupted. Or at least it didn’t feel the same to him, not at all, the way the new things did. The memories beyond that September were beyond fuzzy, glimpses of smiles and brushes of hair. They didn’t belong with him, not anymore. They didn’t even feel like he was a part of them. They seemed more like a movie he briefly watched but fell asleep during the middle of.

That was probably a sign that nothing was worth remembering.

“Are, are you still going to come home, then?” His mother asked, clearly shuffling around in the background. “You were real adamant when we dropped you off that your dad come get you for homecoming.”

“Homecoming?” Richie scoffed. “No one goes to highschool homecoming as a freshman.”

“We tried telling you that, but you were pretty insistent-”

“Nah.” Richie shrugged, leaning back fully on the wall by the booth. “I don’t know what was up with me,” he laughed, shaking his head, shoving his glasses back into their place on the bridge of his nose, “I can’t remember any reason why I’d want to.”

He itched, absently, at the scar on his palm. Flashes of that came back, Stan Uris cutting a line in his hand with a broken bottle, the summer he at one point shook so badly he could actually hear his knees knock.

There would be a time where there would be a good reason for him to return to Derry, but that was a good twenty years in his future.

“You’ll come home for Christmas, though, won’t ya, Rich?” He must

have upset his mother, because his Dad was back on the line.

“I mean, of course,” he snorted, “good to know I’m missed.”